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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000129

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: CEBU MAYOR IMPLICATED IN SERIES OF VIGILANTE-STYLE
KILLINGS

REF: A. 04 MANILA 04251

[1](#)B. 03 MANILA 6557

Classified By: Political Officer Andrew McClearn for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: There have been 14 vigilante-style killings recently in Cebu. Critics have implicated Cebu Mayor Tommy Osmena in the slayings based on his decision to create a special police squad to hunt down criminals. Cardinal Vidal, local congressmen, Cebu's Vice Mayor, and human rights groups have raised public concerns about the killings. In pressing his anti-crime fight in such extra-judicial directions, Osmena seems to be modeling himself after Rodrigo Duterte, the notorious mayor of Davao City, where there have been over 60 vigilante-style killings in the past year. END SUMMARY.

Killings in Cebu

[1](#)2. (U) There have been 14 vigilante-style killings recently in Cebu City. The killings began on December 22 when two hooded men on a motorcycle shot dead a local criminal figure in a drive by shooting. Four more men, each suspected by police of involvement in criminal activity, were gunned down in separate drive by shootings the next day; two of them were at work, two were asleep. The pattern continued on December 27 when a lone gunman allegedly shot to death three suspected criminals. The killings continued on December 29 when five more suspected criminals were killed. On December 30, a garbage collector suspected of involvement in petty drug dealing was also gunned down. In several of the cases mentioned above, the victims' body was reportedly marked with a sign stating, "I am a thief." Besides sharing a similar checkered past, each of the victims reportedly had spent time in Cebu's criminal detention center.

[1](#)3. (U) Philippine National Police (PNP) Director General Edgar Aglipay has ordered an investigation into the string of killings. The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) also initiated its own investigation.

Cebu Mayor Implicated

[1](#)4. (SBU) Critics have implicated Cebu Mayor Tommy Osmena in the slayings based on recent statements he has made. Immediately before the killings began, Mayor Osmena announced the formation of a special 24-member police squad tasked "to suppress and prevent crimes" on December 21. Osmena noted: "We have to be more aggressive. It (the team) will seek and destroy criminal types of activity." During his press briefing, Osmena noted that USD 200-400 bounties will go to police officials who "permanently disable or neutralize" criminals. Osmena said the team would be called the "Hunter" squad. The press later reported that Chief Inspector Arnel Banzon of Cebu's PNP SWAT team would supervise two 12-person groups led by SP04 Rex Campos and SP01 Serafin Asingjo.

[1](#)5. (U) Cebu City Police Chief Melvin Gayotin, in recent remarks, strongly supported the creation of the team, clarifying that it would not practice "vigilante justice," but rather help to "find and arrest criminals." Cebu Governor Gwendolyn Garcia on December 24 applauded Osmena's efforts to combat crime in the city. When he was recently accused of sponsoring the summary killings, Osmena replied, "I am not behind it. But I will say I inspired it. I don't deny that."

Protests Against Killings

[1](#)6. (C) Leading public figures have expressed concern about the killings. Cardinal Ricardo Vidal of Cebu admonished Osmena and appealed to the new anti-crime unit to arrest suspects and not kill them, noting, "I cannot understand how we can terminate the lives of men without the just process we are used to." Vidal, who campaigned against the infamous

"sparrow" (New People's Army) death squads in the 1980s in Davao City, also expressed his deep concern over the violent killings during a January 7 meeting with Dep Polcouns. Raul del Mar, an influential Cebu Congressman, publicly echoed Vidal's concerns. Rep. Eduardo Gullas of Cebu City's 1st District also protested, commenting that: "the ends never justify the means." Osmena's Vice-Mayor Michael Rama also came out against the vigilante-style killings. Many Philippine human rights groups also protested the killings, urging the national government to investigate the situation fully.

COMMENT

17. (C) In pressing his anti-crime fight in such extra-judicial directions, Osmena seems to be modeling himself after the notorious Mayor Duterte of Davao City (see Reftels). Duterte is clearly behind a group called the "Davao Death Squad," which has been implicated in over 60 vigilante-style killings in the past year. We are not sure why Osmena is advocating such extreme measures. The crime rate in Cebu has gone up, but not dramatically so. Consular Representative in Cebu told poloff that he thought that most Cebuanos supported Osmena on the issue, however, as they see crime as a serious problem. Hopefully, the investigation into the situation ordered by PNP Director General Aglipay will end the rash of killings. Unfortunately, there have been similar investigations in Davao in the past, but to no avail.
Ricciardone